



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

Ehrich, Lisa C., Kimber, Megan, Cranston, Neil, & Starr, Karen (2011) Ethical tensions and academic leaders. *Higher Education Review*, 43(3), pp. 50-69.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/43483/>

© Copyright 2011 Tyrrell Burgess Associates Ltd. and the authors.

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

Ethical tensions and academic leaders

Lisa Catherine Ehrich, Megan Kimber, Neil Cranston and Karen Starr

Internationally universities have been characterised by shrinking government funding, fierce competition for student enrolments, and greater pressures to become commercially viable. It is against this complex background that academic leaders have been required to confront and resolve a multitude of conflicting interests as they seek to balance a variety of values in their decision-making processes. In this article we put forward a model of ethical decision-making developed from empirical research and literature. To test the efficacy of the model, a case scenario is posed. The article concludes by raising a number of implications for academic leaders regarding ongoing professional learning needed in this area.

Keywords: ethical dilemmas, university academic leaders, decision-making model

Like all sectors of education, higher education has changed dramatically over the last couple of decades creating a complex organisational milieu in which academics and academic leaders must now work. Among these changes have been fierce competition for student enrolment, competition between and among academics for funding, publications and grants, and a push towards commercialisation of research. It is these and other complex pressures that university academics and academic leaders have been required to deal with in the course of their everyday work. Not surprisingly, such changes have brought with them a multitude of conflicting interests as academics and academic leaders seek to balance a variety of values and expectations in their decision-making processes. Our focus in this article lies with ethical tensions faced by university academic leaders. We define academic leaders as persons who occupy middle to senior management roles in universities such as directors of research centres, heads of schools and deans of faculties, as well as course coordinators. We maintain that, because academic leaders are those persons who are located between senior executives on the one hand

and academics and students on the other hand, they are likely to meet and work with a range of diverse stakeholders in the course of their daily work. They are, therefore, likely to experience clashes leading to ethical dilemmas.

Changing context of universities

Universities, globally, have undergone major changes that have reshaped academic work and the profession (Baldwin, 1997; Fitzmaurice, 2008; MacFarlane, 2004). For example, since the mid 1980s in Australia, there has been an end to major government funding of universities, increased cost cutting to operating grants and the introduction of a user pays system of higher education fees (Dudley, 1998). In a climate of fewer resources, universities have had to adopt commercial and entrepreneurial strategies as a means of generating more funds. The commercialisation of research has led universities to develop closer links with business and industry with the implication that academics and academic leaders have lost some of their autonomy in their quest to access funding (Fitzmaurice 2008; Macfarlane, 2009, 2004; Vidovich and Currie, 1998). This situation has led Marginson (2000) to question whether it is possible to achieve a balance between academic and commercial objectives. As Marginson has indicated, universities have had to grapple with ways of pursuing funding from business, industry and other bodies, while at the same time endeavouring to pursue the goals of higher education: to create knowledge through research and to disseminate knowledge via publications and teaching (Aitkin, 1997; Baldwin, 1997). It can be argued that

‘... The procedures associated with increasing knowledge are governed by some of our strongest moral imperatives [including honesty, integrity, and respect for others] ... Most importantly, the nature of the goal dictates a commitment to the common good ...’ (Baldwin, 1997: 1).

Despite warnings from commentators such as Baldwin (1997), the commodification of higher education has resulted in a user pays system where students pay handsomely for the privilege of a degree. Hence, universities compete for students, both at home and abroad, and often engage in aggressive marketing strategies to attract students to their institutions (Currie, 1998). Paraphrasing the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in the United Kingdom, Bournier and Rospigliosi (2008: 38) refer to increasing focus on universities ‘as an engine of

economic competitiveness and growth'. Some of the negative consequences of the changes to higher education for academics have included increasing workloads and work stress, falling morale, loss of autonomy and freedoms once enjoyed, and alienation from work (Currie and Newson, 1998; DeAngelis, 1998; Margetson, 1997). Fitzmaurice (2008) adds that academic staff are under increasing pressure not only to research and publish quality work in appropriately ranked journals but also to provide excellence in teaching and learning.

In addition to these pressures on tenured academics, academic leaders have had a growing reliance on casual workers—both casual researchers and sessional teachers. While the cadre of aspiring academics has traditionally held casual positions within universities, they have now been joined by a wide range of groups including those who are now forced to rely on multiple, casual research and teaching jobs (Kimber, 2003; Watters and Weeks, 1998). Indeed, 'Internationally, approximately half of all teaching in higher education is reportedly being undertaken by sessional teachers' (Andrew *et al*, 2010: 453). It has been argued by senior university managers that use of casual researchers and sessional teaching staff provides flexibility. Yet for many employees, this flexibility poses significant risks as they become locked into a cycle of casualisation. They experience continued 'average to poor working and employment conditions', as well as 'lack of recognition and opportunity' (Percy and Beaumont, 2008: 147). In other words, casual workers, who are in a large measure female, can become stuck on the periphery of the academic profession, where their employment conditions and prospects are tenuous (eg Brown *et al*, 2010: 170; Kimber, 2003; Wilson *et al*, 2010). The expansion of this non-tenured periphery has raised almost a preoccupation on the quality of teaching and learning (eg, Kimber, 2003; Percy and Beaumont, 2008; Wilson *et al*, 2010). Casualisation of academic work can contribute to the establishment of teaching-only and research-only positions, potentially breaking the historic nexus between teaching and research within the academic profession and generating tensions within the academic community.

Like Whitton (1998: 57), we believe that the pressures and complexities inherent in modern organisations, such as universities, are creating the conditions for ethical dilemmas to flourish. We define an ethical dilemma as a situation where an academic leader feels that he or has been required to make a decision that is considered problematic, wrong or inappropriate. We see academic leaders as being exposed to a 'multitude of competing obligations and interests' (Cooper, 1998: 244). Students, colleagues, institutional managers, industry partners and

corporate clients are among the stakeholders with whom academic leaders have relationships and with whom they may experience clashes leading to ethical dilemmas. Working with a range of diverse stakeholders in a challenging organisational context implies that these leaders would be in a position to confront conflicting forces as they endeavour to balance a variety of stakeholder expectations in their daily decision-making.

Ethics

Ethics has been the focus of increasing attention in recent decades, due in part to the crisis in confidence about government and a lack of trust in public organisations more generally. In the media, there have been countless controversies surrounding the behaviour of ministers, senior public sector managers and other high profile leaders leading to increased cynicism by the larger public (Ehrich *et al*, 2004). Ethics has also begun to receive recognition in the wider leadership literature based on the premise that ethics lies at the heart of leadership (Ciulla, 2006), with effective leaders being ethical leaders. In recent times, there has been a body of research and writing that has explored this line of argument. In both the school leadership literature (see Duignan, 2006; Starratt 2004, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1992) and public sector literature (eg, Cooper, 1998; Edwards, 2001; Gregory and Hicks, 1999; Preston, 2000, 1999; Preston and Sampford, 2002; Uhr, 2002; Whitton, 1998), leadership has been viewed as an ethical activity that is heavily values-laden (Hodgkinson, 1991).

The meaning of ethics has been subject to considerable debate. Often ethics is defined in terms of what it is not. For instance, corruption, misconduct, fraud, illegal behaviour and abuse of power are considered unethical behaviours (Ehrich *et al*, 2004). In contrast, integrity, honesty and professionalism are viewed as features of ethical behaviour (Kuther, 2003). Singer (1993) argues that ethics is about our relationships with others. In other words, ethics can be viewed as a 'philosophy of morality' as it deals with ought and ought not (Mahony, 2009: 983). Ethics, then, requires judgement and reasoning in decision-making and it raises questions regarding what is right, wrong, good or bad conduct, fair or just. It can be described also as a 'set of rules, principles or ways of thinking that guide, or claim authority to guide, the actions of a particular group' (Singer, 1994: 4).

A number of thinkers have put forward ethical principles as a way of providing guidance regarding how to live. For instance, Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth century theologian and philosopher, built on the

work of Plato by identifying seven virtues of an ethical life. These include faith, hope, charity (or love), prudence, temperance, courage and justice (in Christenbury, 2008: 38). Such ideals remain relevant today. Related to these virtues is a set of principles developed by Francis (cited in Francis and Armstrong, 2003) for organisations to minimise risk. These include dignity, equitability, prudence, honesty, openness, goodwill, and avoidance of suffering. Similarly, Greek philosopher, Aristototele, is considered a key proponent of virtue ethics. When focusing on the professions and professional ethics, the Aristotelian virtue of prudence is particularly significant. In the Aristotelian sense, prudence means practical wisdom (eg, Duignan *et al*, 2003; Kane and Patapan, 2006). Here, Aristototele and his contemporary proponents are referring to the practical judgement for deliberating and knowing what principles to apply in a given set of circumstances (Duignan *et al*, 2003: 84-6). It could be argued that the virtue approach is critical to professional ethics as ‘... “a just society depends more upon the moral trustworthiness of its citizens and it[s] leaders than upon structures designed to transform ignoble actions in socially useful results”’ (Hart in Preston and Sampford, 2002: 25-26).

These types of virtues or principles underpin many codes of conduct for professionals and bodies representing professionals. For example, the American Association of University Professors (1987) Statement on Professional Ethics (in Strom-Gottfried and D’Aprix, 2006) identifies five core standards for the profession and these include: responsibility for scholarly competence; holding students to ethical standards, evaluating students in a way that reflects their worth; faculty to treat colleagues in a fair and respectful manner; and professors to promote conditions of free inquiry and promotion of understanding of academic freedom. Like the principles identified earlier, this statement provides a set of principles to guide conduct in higher education. Within Australia, each university has its own code of practice that encourages high standards of behaviour and professionalism. In Queensland, for example, many universities derive their Code of Conduct from the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* (Parliament of Queensland). The five ethical principles enunciated in this act are: respect for the law and system of government; respect for persons; integrity; diligence; and economy and efficiency. Similar principles can be found in the codes of conduct for other Australian universities.

Codes of conduct have been recognised as useful documents in providing broad guidelines about appropriate behaviour, but a number of authors have identified their limitations (Strom-Gottfried and D’Aprix,

2006; Sumison, 2000; Noddings, 1992; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2003). For instance Sumison claims that they tend 'not to acknowledge the constraints and competing priorities that impede the achievement of these ideas' (2000: 173).

To date, there is a small body of research in the field of ethics and academics and academic leaders and even a smaller body on the ethical tensions faced by university academics or academic leaders. Of the writing in this field, MacFarlane (2009, 2004) maintains that much of it concerns unethical practices in research such as the falsification of data, misuse of research funds and plagiarism. Other forms of unethical behaviour in universities have been categorised as the misuse of power and power relationships among key players (Ashford and Davis, 2006). A case study by Lewenson *et al* (2005) explored academic integrity that was violated by a faculty member and by students during an examination. Baca (in Bray, 1999) refers to inappropriate recruitment and admissions practices; passing students' work as acceptable; and failing to provide adequate supervision and/or counselling to students as amongst unethical practices evident in university environments. Robie and Keeping (2004) cite three examples of unethical behaviours by academics and these include involvement in sexual activities with students in exchange for grades; accepting money/gifts in exchange for grades; and plagiarism. According to Morgan and Korschgen (2001) much of the discussion on ethical behaviour in universities has focused around hot topics such as sexual harassment while issues emerging from teacher-student relationships and interactions have not received the same focus.

In an important study that focused on teaching within higher education Fitzmaurice (2008) explored 30 lecturers' philosophy of teaching statements to determine to what extent they revealed insights into moral practice. The findings indicated that lecturers identified good teaching as not only concerned with effective teaching methods but also ethical and moral issues. For instance, five key themes identified by lecturers in higher education via their statements were:

- 'a deep obligation to help students learn
- a desire to create a space for learning and encourage student voice
- caring for students and developing the whole person
- reflection on practice
- professional values and morals' (Fitzmaurice, 2008: 345)

The final theme pointed to the importance of the teacher-student relationships and values of care, responsibility and respect for students. Wanting to make a difference and to work to best support students' learning were sentiments identified in the statements.

Ethical dilemmas

As discussed previously, ethical dilemmas emerge when a person is required to make a decision that requires a choice among competing sets of principles, often in complex and value laden contexts. Difficulties can occur when equally attractive options could be justified as 'right' (Duignan and Collins, 2003; Kidder, 1995) and, conversely, when there are only equally unattractive options with equally undesirable consequences. Finding the 'right' option is unlikely to be an easy feat.

While a number of writers and researchers have provided illustrations of the types of ethical dilemmas that face school teachers in their daily work (see Campbell, 2003, 1997; Helton and Ray, 2005; Johns *et al*, 2008) and school principals (see Cranston *et al*, 2006; Dempster and Berry, 2003; Duignan and Collins, 2003; Duignan, 2002). Keith-Spiegel and Carr (1993: 1) go as far as saying that 'publications and research on ethical dilemmas facing teaching faculty at the university level is scanty'. An exception here is the work of Helton and Ray (2005) who identified several ethical dilemmas facing teachers in both schools and universities. These dilemmas arose from:

- law and policies — the need to go beyond the law such as protecting a student from abuse in the home
- administrative decisions conflicting with personal or professional ethics
- student actions — ethic of care, behavioural issues, plagiarism
- colleagues' actions such as discriminatory behaviour in relation to students and staff
- tensions within professional ethics.

Because there is limited research that has been carried out on dilemmas facing academics, a study of secondary teachers' moral dilemmas in teaching is considered here because it has some relevance to the aforementioned discussion. In interviews with 33 teachers in Finnish schools, Tirri (1999) found that there were four main categories of dilemmas. These related to teachers' work such as how to deal with students, confidentiality, and situations where colleagues were unprofessional; student behaviour including cheating; rights of minority

groups where religion was a key aspect of the dilemma; and rules at school where teachers were inconsistent in following the rules. The findings of Tirri's research are consistent with our own earlier work (Cranston *et al*, 2006) that explored the ethical dilemmas faced by school principals. In our qualitative study, the two major areas principals grappled with were managing poorly performing staff and dealing with student issues.

Towards a model of ethical decision making

The model presented in Figure 1 was developed from two main sources. First, we drew upon existing literature and empirical research on ethics and ethical decision-making models. The literature on ethics in the public sector (eg, Preston, 2000, 1999; Preston and Sampford, 2002; Whitton, 1998) and educational sector (Cooper, 1998; Duignan and Collins, 2003) helped shape our thinking about the key components that formed the basis for our model. We were also influenced by a number of models proposed by Bommer *et al* (1987), Ferrell and Gresham (1985) and Fritzsche (1991) that identified the role of an individual's values and dispositions and how these values are mediated by the organisation, significant others and other key forces. Second, the model was refined through an iterative process where we drew upon the experiences of six senior public sector managers who had faced ethical dilemmas in their careers (Cranston *et al*, 2003; Ehrich *et al*, 2004). We considered their dilemmas in the light of our emerging model and based on their responses we adopted and refined the model. Complementing this approach was a series of discussions we conducted with educators and managers who provided further critical comment on the model.

Figure 1 about here

As can be seen from Figure 1, the model comprises five inter-related components. The first is the critical incident or problem which triggers the ethical dilemma for a person. The second part is a set of competing forces, each of which has the capacity to illuminate the critical incident from its own particular bias or basis. These forces include professional ethics; legal issues or policies; organisational culture; the institutional context; the public interest; society and community; the global context; the political framework; economic and financial contexts; and ?. The question mark (?) signifies an untitled force which could emerge in the future. The third part of the model is the individual who brings his or her own values, beliefs and ethical orientations to the dilemma. It is likely that a person's values would have been shaped over time by a variety of

sources such as religion, socialisation and conscience (Edwards, 2001). The fourth part is the choice made by the individual chosen among the competing alternatives. It is through deliberating the alternatives that the ethical dilemma emerges. The decision the individual takes might lead that person to either ignoring the dilemma or acting in one or more ways. These actions can be formal or informal, external or internal. Finally, the action or non-action can create particular types of implications not only for the individual but also for the employing organisation or community. The diagram shows also that new incidents or dilemmas can emerge from the action or inaction, thus setting off another critical incident or dilemma. The section that follows provides a case scenario describing an ethical dilemma faced by a university academic leader.

Case scenario

Julie is the coordinator of a core subject shared by several degree programmes within a large university. Approximately 600 students enrol in the subject each semester. As a consequence, she employs a number of sessional staff to assist with teaching. One of these tutors is Cathy, who has been tutoring in this subject for several years and Julie has developed a friendship with Cathy as a result. Following completion of the major assessment piece for this subject, Julie receives complaints from a number of students in Cathy's tutorial group. Several students, including a number of international students, are seeking re-marks of their essay because they received low marks and no feedback. They believe they have been treated unfairly in their assessment and that the tutor had taken a particularly hard line with them. Several other students are concerned about Cathy making what they consider to be some inappropriate comments within the tutorial session, some of these relate to negative comments about the poor quality of this particular group of international students. Julie is aware that Cathy is currently going through a divorce and has two young children to support. As Cathy has no other work, without the money from sessional teaching, she will struggle financially. This situation is distressing for Julie as she is concerned for both the students and for Cathy. What should Julie do?

Discussion

The following discussion is used as illustration only of the issues surrounding this particular ethical dilemma. It is understood that other interpretations might have equally been appropriately applied in this case.

It is assumed in this situation that Julie is the individual decision maker and that she finds this particular situation problematic. The *critical incident* can be summarised as several students making complaints about a tutor. All of the nine *forces* described in the model would appear to be at play in Julie's ethical dilemma. It is clear that she draws on her beliefs about ethical conduct from her experience as an academic, thus *professional ethics* is one of the key forces that will impact on her decision. It is likely that her professional ethics derive from strong beliefs she holds about principles of justice and of care in the treatment of staff and students.

Closely aligned to her professional ethics, Julie, like many academics, is likely to believe that universities should operate and serve the *public interest*. The university has an important leadership and educative role to play in the community; thus it is incumbent on its academic managers to act in ways that would meet the expectations and needs of its community. That is to say, universities are viewed as public goods.

The university's Code of Conduct, developed within the *institutional context*, stipulates certain expected standards of behaviour for academics and academic leaders such as providing quality teaching and learning, and employment on merit. The *society* force refers to key players, such as students, staff, and members of the wider community. Unless Julie investigates the students' allegations, the quality of their university experience might be diminished. The *economic force* is also of concern for Julie as she is aware of the financial consequences for Cathy and her children should Cathy's employment be terminated. As noted earlier, casual staff working in universities often experience poor pay and conditions. There are also economic considerations regarding the university's ability to attract and retain international students from whom considerable income is derived.

The *global context* is also a factor in this scenario since globalisation is a powerful force that has shaped an array of university practices from full fee paying students to the commercialisation of research in recent decades (eg, Macfarlane, 2004; Marginson, 2000). In this situation it is apparent in the international students in Cathy's tutorial. As these students are likely to have paid full fees, they would be expecting to receive quality teaching.

The *organisational culture* is likely to play a role in this situation. How other academic managers have dealt with student complaints about teaching staff will have set a precedent for how Julie deals (or does not deal) with the situation. Such precedents might include automatic re-marking of student work or liaising with the Head of School regarding

professional development for staff. Whether the institution has a culture and/or history of unethical behaviour is a question of some importance.

The *legal force* not only relates to legislation (eg, Anti-discrimination or Freedom of Information) but also what is perceived as legal and illegal behaviour of officials in the university. In this situation, the legal force can be found in industrial legislation such as the Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements of the former Howard Government (Percy and Beaumont, 2008) and the university's enterprise bargaining agreement with the relevant unions. It could also be seen in how the university deals with maintaining quality of teaching in respect to sessional staff.

The *political force* is also a factor in this scenario. The casualisation of academic work is an issue that resonates within education policy community at international, national and institutional levels (eg, Kimber, 2003; Strike and Taylor, 2009; Percy and Beaumont, 2008; Brown, Goodman and Yasukawa, 2010). 'Internationally, approximately half of all teaching in higher education is reportedly being undertaken by sessional teachers' (Andre *et al*, 2010: 453). In response to economic, political and legal forces, universities have sought to increase their employment of casual staff. It is only recently that unions, in Australia at least, have been mobilised by casual academic members to seek caps on the numbers of casual staff and improvements in their remuneration. These conflicting movements would impact on academic leaders in Julie's faculty in terms of the number of casual staff that they employ as well as whether and what type of professional development those staff might be offered. Julie might be aware in her deliberations that the expansion of this non-tenured periphery has raised almost a preoccupation on the quality of teaching and learning (eg, Kimber, 2003; Percy and Beaumont, 2008) and that this periphery is gendered as more women than men occupy these tenuous positions (Kimber, 2003; Brown *et al*, 2010). It is also possible that Julie might be aware of the power relationship between herself and Cathy, one that is exacerbated by the industrial divide between the shrinking tenured core in which Julie is located and the expanding tenuous periphery within in which Cathy is located (eg, Kimber, 2003; Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2008; Brown *et al*, 2010).

We would argue that the situation in which Julie finds herself could be described as one of multiple and conflicting values or accountabilities. There seem to be conflicts among more than one set of competing values. Possible conflicts might include: care for a colleague versus Julie's professional values around teaching and learning; justice for the students

versus mercy towards Cathy; supervisor directive to not re-employ Cathy versus personal values; organising professional development for Cathy versus not re-employing her; or adherence to institutional policies versus loyalty to a colleague (eg, Cranston *et al*, 2006; Tirri, 1999). Through this scenario it is apparent that academic leaders do not work within a social, cultural, political, or economic vacuum; the university context is highly complex and challenging.

The decision that Julie makes forms part of the *ethical dilemma*, as she struggles to reach what might be described as a clear acceptable response to the students, to Cathy, to the university, to the community, and to herself. The actions Julie takes either subsequently to or as part of the decision itself could be either *formal* or *informal*. Action might also be *external* or *internal*. Ignoring the situation, an action itself, is most likely not an option as there will be an expectation to respond to the students' concerns. Some actions might include any or combinations of the following examples.

Formal action might mean following the processes and procedures outlined in the university's manual of policies and procedures such as filling out the paperwork required for remarking student work or the non-renewal of Cathy's contract. This action would see Julie give serious consideration to the students' complaints. An *informal action* in this case might involve meeting with students to gain a greater understanding of their concerns. It could also entail meeting with Cathy to outline the complaints made against her and to provide an opportunity for her to put her perspective on the issues. *External action* might involve Julie taking the matter outside the faculty to a human resource manager or even outside the university to seek advice from the union, for instance. In some cases where the decision maker considers that there is no other alternative, external action could entail taking the issue to the media; that is, through an internal 'leak'. Julie might prefer to take *internal action* such as remarking student essays or organising professional development for Cathy.

Irrespective of the decision Julie makes, there are certain *implications* for the individual, the organisation and the community.

Individual

If Julie were to remark the students' work and uphold their complaints about Cathy's conduct within the tutorial she would be upholding her professional ethics as well as institutional policies and practices. Yet she might also feel personally distressed for the situation that Cathy could face if her contract were not renewed as a consequence of the students'

complaints. Julie might seek to resolve this tension by recommending professional development to Cathy.

Organisation

How Julie resolves this ethical dilemma could impact on institutional practice and on the organisational culture. If Julie were to not renew Cathy's contract, other subject and course coordinators might also consider not renewing the contracts of their sessional staff should they be the subject of a student complaint—rightly or wrongly. Similarly, if Julie upholds the students' complaints and provides Cathy with professional development, others within the university might come to take the view that sessional staff members should be treated in a similar manner to their tenured colleagues.

Community

Should the students' complaints not be fully investigated and those students convey their dissatisfaction to friends and family outside the university then Julie's reputation and that of the faculty could be adversely affected. Similarly, should Cathy's contract not be renewed, Julie specifically and the university more generally could be seen as uncaring; thus diminishing the university's standing with the community. If the students' complaints are fully investigated and Cathy is offered professional development, academic unions could view this decision as a win for their campaign to improve employment for casual staff. Alternatively, should Julie, perhaps at the behest of her head of school, not renew Cathy's contract, her decision could be viewed as having been influenced by the impact of corporate, neo-liberal views on the management and functioning of universities.

From this analysis, it is clear that the decision Julie takes has implications for herself and Cathy as individuals, and for the organisation and the community. It is also apparent that these domains are not independent but rather that there is considerable interdependence. In the case detailed here, it is anticipated that Julie would be aware of the issues identified above when she weighs up the options and makes a decision.

In a university context where academic values and corporate values are likely to be in tension (eg, Macfarlane 2009, 2004; Marginson, 2000; Marginson and Considine, 2000), it is possible that academic managers like public service managers and school leaders are exposed to a greater number and range of ethical dilemmas (eg, Kane and Patapan, 2006; Cranston *et al*, 2003, 2006; Ehrich *et al*, 2004). In our previous research we found that dealing with staff underperformance and student issues

were two of the most common dilemmas facing Australian school leaders (Cranston *et al*, 2006). While not suggesting that higher education institutions are the same as schools, we believe that those involved in teaching in these institutions are likely to experience similar ethical dilemmas due to the significance attached to quality teaching and learning, and to the commercialisation of educational institutions. As the scenario and analysis presented in this article illustrates, the ethical dilemmas model provides a way of assisting employees—whether they be school teachers, academics or public servants—to identify and resolve the ethical dilemmas that they face in their daily working lives.

Returning to Kidder's (1995) choices of 'right versus wrong' and 'right versus right', the dilemma faced by Julie might seem at first glance to fit the 'right versus wrong' category. Yet, as indicated above, it could be argued that it is more complex than simply a case of students right and teacher wrong. How ethical Julie's response is to the situation might be constrained by a variety of factors including institutional policies and practices, and organisational culture. Similarly, the decision that Julie takes will have consequences for those institutional policies and practices, and that organisational culture.

Implications and conclusion

Almost three decades ago, Callahan (1982) argued that every university would do well to provide forums for examining academic ethical issues as a way of raising awareness regarding ethics in university life. It seems that not much has happened since 1982 as there continue to be calls for universities in the United States (Ashford and Davis, 2006), United Kingdom (Macfarlane, 2004) and Australia (Ehrich *et al*, 2005) to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for academics to raise their awareness of the ethical dimensions of their work. In the complex and value laden context within which academic leaders now find themselves, there is often little opportunity for them to reflect on ethical issues (Macfarlane, 2004; Strom-Gottfried and D'Aprix, 2006). We would argue that to address this situation it is necessary for academics—both tenured and casual—to receive ongoing professional development to assist them 'build on and sustain the moral and professional purposes' (Fitzmaurice, 2008: 350) of their work. By the 'moral purposes', Fitzmaurice is referring to a type of professional development where the ethical and moral dimensions of academics' work is given attention. Like Fitzmaurice, Macfarlane (2004) makes a strong argument for academics to understand their role within research and teaching as one informed by their own ethics and values.

Robie and Keeping (2004) propose that universities should provide initial and ongoing learning opportunities for staff. For new staff, he points out activities such as role plays, simulations and feedback opportunities to raise their awareness of ethical issues and acceptable behaviour. Yet, what is usual practice in most Australian universities is some initial training on codes of conduct for new staff during their orientation. Apart from this, staff, in Australia at least, tend not to be exposed to other forms of training. A recent initiative developed by human resource management staff within a Queensland based university has been the introduction of an on-line programme on ethical decision making. It is designed to raise both academic and professional staffs' awareness and understanding of ethical behaviour. Staff at this university will be strongly encouraged to undertake the programme and a certificate will be given to those who complete the training.

Earlier, we commented that while codes of conduct are useful documents and starting points, they are limited in what they can do. We concur with Robie and Keeping (2004) and Begley (1999) who argue that instruction on ethical practice needs to be grounded in the realities of daily university life where case studies and other scenarios can be used to build understandings and ethical insights. This type of training is more likely to help 'faculty define fundamental judgements for analysing their behaviours within ethical situations [and]... will assist in refining their role as faculty of high ethical character' (Ashford and Davis, 2006: 11-12).

In conclusion, the model and scenario presented in this article may assist in heightening awareness of the importance of ethics and ethical dilemmas amongst academic leaders within the university environment. Two of the authors of this article have provided workshop sessions for teachers and school leaders where we have explored ethical dilemmas through a discussion of scenarios (identified by ourselves and by participants) and tested these against the model. Our own experience suggests that there continues to be great interest in any type of professional development that encourages professionals to reflect upon their values and beliefs and where they are afforded opportunities to discuss in an open and honest forum their thoughts regarding core issues affecting their work. As part of our ongoing research on the ethical dilemmas in higher education, we will be further testing this model when we undertake a quantitative research project involving the nature of and extent to which ethical dilemmas are experienced by course coordinators across three Australian universities.

Address for correspondence

Lisa C. Ehrich, School of Learning & Professional Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove, Queensland, 4059, Australia.

References

- Aitkin, D (1997) *Submission to the Higher Education Review Committee, Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy*, paper downloaded from the Higher Education Review Committee at <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/herereview/submissions/A/aitkin> (accessed 27 September 2009)
- Andrew, S, Halcomb, E A, Jackson, D, Peters, K and Salamonson, Y (2010) 'Sessional teachers in a BN program: Bridging the divide or widening the gap?', *Nurse Education Today*, 30: 453-457
- Ashford, T K and Davis, L (2006) *Defining professional behaviour: A situational look at ethics in the classrooms and laboratories of American colleges and universities*, paper downloaded from Proceedings of the 2006 Informing Science and IT Education Joint Conference, at <http://informingscience.org/proceedings/inSITE2006/ProcAshf116.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2010)
- Baldwin, G (1997) *The Nature of Universities: Four Elementary Lessons. Submission to the Higher Education Review Committee, Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy*, paper downloaded from the Higher Education Review Committee at <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/herereview/sbmissions/B/baldwin> (accessed 27 September 2009)
- Begley, P (1999) (Ed) *Values and Educational Leadership*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press
- Bommer, M, Gratto, C, Gravander, J and Tuttle, M (1987) 'A behavioural model of ethical and unethical decision making', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 6: 265-281
- Bourner, T and Rospigliosi, P Asher (2008) 'Forty years on: Long term change in the first destinations of graduates', *Higher Education Review*, 41 (1): 36-59
- Bray, N J (1999) *Social control of administrative impropriety: An analysis of college and university administrators*, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, 24th San Antonio, Texas, November 18-21. ED HE 032 703
- Brown, T, Goodman, J and Yaskuwa, K (2010) 'Academic Casualization in Australia: Class Divisions in the University', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 52 (10): 169-182
- Callahan, D (1982) 'Should there be an academic code of ethics?' *Journal of Higher Education*, 53 (3): 335-346
- Campbell, E (1997) 'Administrators' decisions and teachers' ethical dilemmas: implications for moral agency', *Leading and Managing*, 3: 245-257

- Campbell, E (2003) 'Let right be done: trying to put ethical standards into practice', in Begley, P T and Johansson, O (Eds), *The Ethical Dimensions of School Leadership*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers
- Christenbury, L (2008) 'A consideration of the ethics of teaching English', *English Journal*, 97 (6): 32-38
- Ciulla, J (2006) 'Ethics: The heart of leadership', in Maak, T and N M Press (Eds), *Responsible Leadership*, London: Routledge
- Cooper, T L (1998) *The Responsible Administrator: An approach to ethics for the administrative role*, 4th edition, San Francisco: Jossey Bass
- Cranston, N, Ehrich, L and Kimber, M (2003) *Ethical dilemmas faced by senior public sector managers: Towards an exploratory model*, paper given at Academic Day, Institute of Public Administration Australia, National Conference, Brisbane, 26 November
- Cranston, N, Ehrich, L C, and Kimber, M P (2006) 'Ethical dilemmas: the "bread and butter" of educational leaders' lives', *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44 (2): 106-121
- Currie, J (1998) 'Introduction', in Currie, J and Newson, J (eds) *Universities and Globalization*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Currie, J and Newson, J (1998) (Eds) *Universities and Globalization*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- DeAngelis, R (1998) 'The last decade of higher education reform in Australia and France: Different constraints, differing choices in higher education politics and policies', in Currie, J and Newson, J (eds) *Universities and Globalization*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Dempster, N and Berry, V (2003) 'Blindfolded in a Minefield: principals' ethical decision-making', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33 (3): 457-477
- Dudley, J (1998) 'Globalization as an analytical concept and local policy responses', in Currie, J and Newson, J (Eds) *Universities and Globalization*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Duignan, P A (2002) 'Being an authentic leader in a contemporary world', *Prime Focus*, 31: 2-4
- Duignan, P (2006) *Educational Leadership: Key Challenges and Ethical Tensions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Duignan, P and Collins, V (2003) 'Leadership challenges and ethical dilemmas in front line organisations', in Bennett, B, Crawford, M and Cartwright, M (Eds) *Effective Educational Leadership*, London: Open University
- Duignan, P, Burford, C, Collins, V, Cresp, M, d' Arbon, T, Fagan, M, Gorman, M, Ikin, R, Kavanagh, A, Kelleher, M, Nagappan, S and Walsh, M (2003) *Contemporary Challenges and Implications for Leaders in Frontline Human Service Organisations*, Sydney: Australian Catholic University
- Edwards, G (2001) 'Ethics in practice', *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration*, 102: 11-17
- Ehrich, LC, Cranston, N, and Kimber, M P (2004) 'Public sector managers and ethical dilemmas', *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management*, 10 (1): 25-37

- Ehrlich, L, Cranston, N and Kimber, M (2005) *Academic Managers and ethics: A question of making the right decision*. Paper given at the 28th HERDSA Annual Conference, 'Higher Education in a Changing world: Research and Development in Higher Education', 3-7 July 2005, Australia, New South Wales, Sydney.
- Ferrell, O and Gresham, L (1985) 'A contingency framework for understanding ethical decision making in marketing', *Journal of Marketing*, 49: 87-96
- Fitzmaurice, M (2008) 'Voices from within: teaching in higher education as a moral practice', *Teaching in Higher education*, 13 (3): 341-352
- Francis, R, and Armstrong, A (2003) 'Ethics as a risk management strategy: The Australian experience', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 45 (4): 375-385
- Fritzsche, D (1991) 'A model of decision-making incorporating ethical values', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 10: 841-852
- Gregory, R and Hicks, C (1999) 'Promoting public service integrity', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 58: 3-15
- Helton, G B and Ray, B A (2005) 'Strategies school practitioners report they would use to resist pressure to practice unethically', *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 22 (1): 43-65
- Hockey, J and Allen-Collinson, J (2009) 'Occupational Knowledge and Practice Amongst UK University Research Administrators', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 63 (2): 141-159
- Hodgkinson, C (1991) *Educational Leadership: The moral art*, Albany, NY: Suny Press
- Johns, B H, McGrath, M Z, and Mathur, S R (2008) *Ethical Dilemmas in Education: Standing up for Honesty and Integrity*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield
- Kakabadse, A, Korac-Kakabadse, N, and Kouzmin, A (2003) 'Ethics, values and behaviours: Comparison of three case studies examining the paucity of leadership in government', *Public Administration*, 81 (3): 477-508
- Kane, J and Patapan, H (2006) 'In Search of Prudence: The Hidden Problem of Managerial Reform', *Public Administration Review*, 66 (5): 711-724
- Keith-Spiegel, P and Carr, K (1993) 'Annotated bibliography: Ethical issues in teaching and academic life', Society for the Teaching of Psychology, APA Division 2, Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology, downloaded at Department of Psychology, Georgia Southern University, at <http://teachpsych.org/otrp/resources/keith-spiegel93.pdf> (accessed 3 July 2010)
- Kidder, R M (1995) *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living*, New York: William Morrow
- Kimber, M (2003) 'The tenured "core" and the tenuous "periphery": The casualisation of academic work in Australian Universities', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25: 41-50
- Kuther, T L (2003) 'A profile of the ethical professor: Student views', *College Teaching*, 51(4): 153-160

- Lewenson, S B, Trugglio-Londrigan, M and Singleton, J (2005) 'Practice What You Teach: A Case Study of Ethical conduct in the Academic Setting', *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 21 (2): 89-96
- Macfarlane, B (2004) *Teaching with Integrity: The Ethics of Higher Education Practice*, London: Routledge Falmer
- Macfarlane, B (2009) *Researching with Integrity: The Ethics of Academic Enquiry*, New York: Routledge
- Mahony, P (2009) 'Should "ought" be taught?' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25: 983-989
- Margetson, D (1997) 'Ethics in assessing and developing academic quality', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 22(2): 123-134
- Marginson, S (2000) 'Rethinking academic work in a global era', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 22 (1): 23-36
- Marginson, S and Considine, M (2000) *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Morgan, B and Korschgen, A (2001) 'The ethics of faculty behaviour: Students' and professors' views', *College Student Journal*, 35 (3): 418-422
- Noddings, N (1992) *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*, New York: Teachers College Press
- Parliament of Queensland (1994) *Queensland Public Sector Ethics Act (1994)*, Brisbane: Parliament of Queensland
- Percy, A and Beaumont, R (2008) 'The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 30 (2): 145-157
- Preston, N (2000) 'Public sector ethics: what are we talking about?' in Bishop, P and Preston, N (Eds) *Local Government, Public Enterprise and Ethics*, Sydney: The Federation Press
- Preston, N (1999) 'Public Sector Ethics in Queensland Since Fitzgerald', downloaded at Australian Society of Archivists 1999 Conference, at <http://www.archivists.org.au/events/conf99/preston.html> (accessed 16 January 2003)
- Preston, N and Samford, C with Connors, C (2002) *Encouraging Ethics and Challenging Corruption*, Sydney: The Federation Press
- Robie, C and Keeping, L M (2004) 'Perceptions of Ethical Behaviour Among Business Faculty in Canada', *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 2: 221-247
- Sergiovanni, T (1992) *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass
- Singer, P (1993) 'About Ethics' in his *Practical Ethics*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Singer, P (1994) 'Introduction' in his *Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Starratt, R (1996) *Transforming Educational Administration: Meaning, community and excellence*, New York: McGraw Hill
- Starratt, R (2004) *Ethical Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass
- Strike, T and Taylor, J (2009) 'The Career Perceptions of Academic Staff and Human Resource Discourses in English Higher Education Institutions', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 63 (2): 177-195

- Strom-Gottfried, K and D'Aprix, A (2006) Ethics for Academics, *Social Work Education*, 25 (3): 225-244
- Sumsion, J (2000) Caring and empowerment: A teacher educator's reflection on an ethical dilemma', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 5 (2): 167-79
- Tirri, K (1999) 'Teachers' perceptions of moral dilemmas at school', *Journal of Moral Education*, 28 (1): 31-47
- Uhr, J (2002) 'Competing Models of Integrity', *Res Publica*, 11 (2): 13-16
- Vidovich, L and Currie, J (1998) 'Changing accountability and autonomy at the "coalface" of academic work in Australia', in Currie, J and Newson, J (eds) *Universities and Gglobalization*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Watters, J and Weeks, P (1998) *Part-time Academic Staff: Creating A Voice*, paper presented at the HERDSA Annual International Conference, University of Auckland, New Zealand, July
- Whitton, H (1998) 'Wisdom, values and ethics in the public sector - or, where the woozle wasn't', *Canberra Bulletin of Public Administration*, 89: 53-61
- Wilson, J, Marks, G, Noone, L, and Hamilton-Mckenzie, J (2010) 'Retaining a foothold on the slippery paths of academia: university women, indirect discrimination, and the academic marketplace', *Gender and Education* 22 (5): 4535-4545